

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8937
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 1223

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: THE CONGRESS SPLIT

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SORTING OUT HAS
TAKEN PLACE, ANY DEFINITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULT OF
MRS. GANDHI'S SPLIT OF THE CONGRESS PARTY REMAINS
PREMATURE. A MORE ACCURATE APPRAISAL CAN ONLY BE MADE
AFTER THE STATE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 25,
BUT EVEN THIS POST-ELECTION LINEUP IS UNLIKELY TO
REPRESENT A FINAL SETTLING DOWN OF POLITICAL PARTY
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ALIGNMENTS. THE THREE WEEKS SINCE THE SPLIT HAVE
FEATURED INTENSE ACTIVITY ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTED
AND QUIET TESTING OF THE POLITICAL WATERS BY THE
UNCERTAIN. MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT THE REDDY GROUP
TO HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL LEAD IN THE LOK SABHA AND A
SLIM ONE IN THE RAJYA SABHA. REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED
FROM THE CONSULATES GENERAL AND DEVELOPED HERE

DISCLOSE A CONFUSED PICTURE AT THE STATE LEVEL. MRS. GANDHI'S SUPPORTERS SEEM TO HAVE THE EDGE IN BIHAR, KASHMIR, HIMACHAL PRADESH, TAMILNADU, KARNATAKA, AND, POSSIBLY, GUJARAT. KERALA, RAJASTHAN, WEST BENGAL, ORISSA, ASSAM, MADHYA PRADESH, AND MAHARASHTRA SEEM TO LEAN TOWARD THE REDDY GROUP. THE SITUATION IN OTHER STATES APPEARS EVEN LESS CLEAR. GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE SIDED WITH ONE SIDE OR ANOTHER ARE DIFFICULT TO MAKE. AS USUAL IN INDIAN POLITICS, RHETORIC MASKS A COMPLEX OF MOTIVES INCLUDING' FACTIONAL RIVALRIES, PERSONAL LOYALTIES, AND CASTE AND COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS. THERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY MANY WHO HAVE COME TO MRS. GANDHI'S SIDE BECAUSE THEY SEE IN HER CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP THE ONLY NATIONAL HOPE OF A NATIONAL REVIVAL OF THE CONGRESS. THOSE WHO DO SO ARE NOT NECESSARILY ENDORSING AUTHORITARIANISM, THOUGH IN THE STILL HIGHLY UNLIKELY EVENT OF AN INDIRA COMEBACK THAT IS WHAT THEY WILL GET. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE THREE WEEKS FOLLOWING INDIRA GANDHI'S JANUARY 1-2 NEW DELHI CONVENTION WHICH ESTABLISHED A PARALLEL CONGRESS PARTY WITH THE FORMER PM AS ITS PRESIDENT, INDIAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND COMMENTARY HAVE LARGELY FOCUSSED ON THE STRUGGLE FOR THE HUMAN, MATERIAL, AND SYMBOLIC ASSETS OF THE DIVIDED PARTY. THE PRESS HAS BEEN FULL OF CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS, CONFIDENTIAL

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CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES, AND ALTHOUGH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF SORTING OUT HAS TAKEN PLACE ANY DEFINITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE POST-SPLIT LINEUP IS STILL PREMATURE. THE CONVENING OF PARLIAMENT (ON FEBRUARY 20) AND THE STATE ASSEMBLIES, WHICH WILL OBLIGE CONGRESS MEMBERS LITERALLY TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED, WILL PROVIDE A BETTER IDEA OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES AND OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE BREAK HAS OCCASIONED DEFECTIONS TO JANATA. BUT A MORE ACCURATE APPRAISAL WILL ONLY BE POSSIBLE AFTER THE PROCESS CULMINATING IN STATE ELECTIONS ON FEBRUARY 25 HAS BEEN COMPLETED. THE AWARD OF PARTY TICKETS WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT IN DETERMINING THE ALLEGIANCES OF WOULD-BE NOMINEES IN THE STATES WHICH GO TO THE POLLS. THE VOTING ITSELF WILL NOT ONLY DETERMINE THE LEGISLATIVE LINEUPS IN THESE STATES, IT WILL ALSO INFLUENCE FENCE-SITTING AND EVEN APPARENTLY ALIGNED CONGRESSMEN THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. WE THINK IT UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN THIS POST-STATE ELECTION STATE OF AFFAIRS WILL REPRESENT A FINAL, DEFINITIVE SETTLING DOWN OF POLITICAL PARTY ALIGNMENTS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 NEW DELHI 1223

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

2. THESE THREE WEEKS HAVE BEEN HIGHLIGHTED BY INTENSE
ACTIVITY ON THE PART OF COMMITTED CONGRESS LEADERS AND
QUIET TESTING OF THE POLITICAL WATERS BY THOSE STILL
UNCERTAIN WHICH WAY TO GO. NATIONAL FIGURES LED BY
MRS. GANDHI HAVE BEEN SCURRYING ABOUT THE COUNTRY.,
RALLYING SUPPORT AND BUCKING UP THE FAITHFUL. PARTY
COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN ORGANIZED AND REORGANIZED AS THE
TWO SIDES DETERMINEDLY GO ABOUT EXPELLING ONE ANOTHER'S
SUPPORTERS FROM PARTY POSITIONS AND APPOINTING THEIR
OWN TO REPLACE THEM. WELL-PUBLICIZED ACCOUNTS HAVE APPEARED
OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN THE STRUGGLE OVER PARTY PROPERTY.
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THE ISSUE OF THE PARTY'S COW-AND-CALF SYMBOL HAS BEEN BEFORE THE CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER. ON JANUARY 23 HE RULED THAT THE REDDY GROUP COULD USE THE SYMBOL IN THE STATE ELECTION. MRS. GANDHI MAY APPEAL.

3. MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT THE REDDY GROUP TO HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL MARGIN IN THE LOK SABHA AND A SLIM ONE IN THE RAJYA SABHA. REPORTS WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE CONSULATES GENERAL HIGHLIGHT THE CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY OF THE SITUATION IN THE STATES. CALCUTTA REPORTS THAT THERE WILL PROBABLY BE A TRUE SPLIT, YIELDING TWO VIABLE IF NOT POTENTIALLY VICTORIOUS, POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN BIHAR, WEST BENGAL, AND ORISSA. IN BIHAR, THE INDIRA GROUP -- OR CONGRESS (CONVENTIONIST) AS IT IS GENERALLY CALLED -- APPEARS TO HAVE THE EDGE IN NUMBERS, THOUGH A KNOWLEDGEABLE AND NEUTRAL BIHAR CONGRESSMAN HAS TOLD THE CONGRESS, THE REDDY GROUP HAS MORE "BRAIN POWER". IN WEST BENGAL, THE ANTI-INDIRA STATE CONGRESS COMMITTEE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN OBLIGED TO EXPEL SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF INDIRISTS FROM THE STATE ORGANIZATION. THESE HAVE FORMED THEIR OWN STATE COMMITTEE. THEY HAVE ATTRAC ATTRACTED THE SUPPORT OF ALMOST ALL MUSLIM AND SCHEDULED CASTE LEADERS OF THE PARTY. THE CONVENTIONISTS, LARGELY RURAL BASED, SEEM LESS COHESIVE THEN THE REDDY GROUP, AND APPEAR MORE A COALITION OF FORCES WHICH HAVE A RECORD OF FIGHTING EACH OTHER OVER MANY ISSUES IN THE PAST. IN ORISSA, MOST OF THE EFFECTIVE AND ESTABLISHED CONGRESSMEN SEEM AS OF NOW TO HAVE INDICATED THEIR PREFERENCE FOR THE REDDY CONGRESS. HOWEVER, THE IMPORTANT ADVI ADIVASI (TRIBAL) AREAS REMAIN AN IMPENDERABLE, AND SHOULD THE JANATA-DISOWNED FORMER CHIEF MINISTER NANDINI SATPATHY REJOIN MRS. GANDHI THAT MOVE COULD BRING AN EFFECTIVE SEGMENT OF ACTIVE CONGRESSMEN INTO THE CONVENTIONIST CONFIDENTIAL

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4. ASSAM TAKES ON GREATER IMPORTANCE THAN ITS SIZE WOULD ORDINARILY GIVE IT BECAUSE IT HAS A CONGRESS STATE GOVERNMENT AND FACES ELECTIONS ON FEBRUARY 25. ALTHOUGH THE INDIRA GROUP HAS SET UP ITS STATE CONGRESS COMMITTEE AND ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO CONTEST ALL SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY CONTESTS, THE CONGRESS ESTABLISHMENT LED BY THE CHIEF MINISTER AND STATE COMMITTEE PRESIDENT SEEMS FAIRLY SLIDLY IDENTIFIED WITH REDDY.

5. IN THE SOUTH, MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS APPARENTLY HAS CAPTURED ONLY ONE OF THE STATE CONGRESS ORGANIZATIONS, AND THAT THE LEAST IMPORTANT, IN TAMILNADU. IN ADHRA PRADESH, CHIEF MINISTER J. VENGALA RAO STILL APPEARS SECURE DESPITE

THE RESIGNATION OF A TOTAL OF TWELVE OF HIS MINISTERS, SEVEN OF WHOM JOINED THE INDIRA CONGRESS WITH FIVE GOING TO JANATA. ALTHOUGH CONGEN MADRAS IS BEGINNING TO HEAR THAT THE REDDY CONGRESS MAY FINISH A POOR THIRD IN THE STATE ELECTIONS, THERE IS STILL NO EVIDENCE OF ANY MASS DEFECTION FROM THE GROUP. IN KERALA, THE HIGHLY REGARDED CHIEF MINISTER HAS STUCK WITH REDDY, AND MRS. GANDHI'S GROUP SUFFERED A SEVERE SETBACK WHEN IT WAS EXPELLED FROM THE RULING FRONT. IN KARNATAKA, WHICH HAS BEEN UNDER PRESIDENT'S RULE SINCE THE DOWNFALL OF PRO-INDIRA CHIEF MINISTER URS ON DECEMBER 31, THE CONVENTIONISTS SEEM IN THE LEAD. OBSERVERS THERE BELIEVE THAT IT IS THIS GROUP, WITH ITS IMPORTANT SUPPORT AMONG HARIJANS AND WEAKER SECTIONS OF SOCIETY, WHICH WILL FIGHT IT OUT AGAINST JANATA IN THE ELECTION, WITH THE REDDY CONGRESS COMING IN A DISTANT THIRD.

6. CONGEN BOMBAY REPORTS THAT IN MAHARASHTRA, ALSO FACING ELECTIONS, THE CONGRESS REMAINS FAIRLY COHESIVE AND UNITED UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF Y.B. CHAVAN, CHIEF MINISTER PATIL, AND FORMER CHIEF MINISTER NAIK. MRS. GANDHI ENJOYS SOME SUPPORT IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE STATE (VIDARBHA) AND REPORTEDLY GOT GOOD
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CROWDS WHEN SHE VISITED THERE OVER THE WEEKEND TO RALLY HER BACKERS. IN GUJARAT, THE PARTY SEEMS TO HAVE SPLIT RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE, WITH THE CONVENTIONISTS SEEMINGLY ENJOYING THE LEAD BUT MANY LEADERS REPORTED IN THE UNCOMMITTED COLUMN. IN MADHYA PRADESH THE BULK OF THE LEADERSHIP HAS REPORTEDLY SIDED WITH THE REDDY GROUP, BUT THE CONGEN CAUTIONS THAT THE SITUATION CANNOT BE TAKEN AS FINAL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 NEW DELHI 1223

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

7. THE SITUATION IN NORTH INDIA IS AS CONFUSED AND FLUID AS ELSEWHERE. PUNJAB SEEMS MORE OR LESS EVENLY DIVIDED. THE TWO SIKHS WHO SERVED IN MRS. GANDHI'S CABINET HAVE GONE IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS, SWARAN SINGH TO THE REDDY GROUP, GURDIAL SINGH DHILLON TO THE CONVENTIONISTS. HARYANA ALSO SEEMS IN THE SAME BOAT. THE REDDY GROUP APPEARS TO HAVE AN EDGE IN RAJASTHAN, MRS. GANDHI'S GROUP IS THE MORE POWERFUL IN JAMMU & KASHMIR, WHERE IT MAY HAVE BEEN BOOSTED BY THE UNSYMPATHETIC SUPPORT FOR HER OF CHIEF MINISTER SHEIKH ABDULLAH. IN CONTROL OF THE STATE CONGRESS COMMITTEE, IT HAS EXPELLED FORMER UNION MINISTER KARAN SINGH, A POWER
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IN JAMMU AND NOW ONE OF MRS. GANDHI'S MOST OUTSPOKEN CRITICS. HER GROUP ALSO LEADS IN TIMACHAL PRADESH. BOTH GROUPS ARE MAKING CLAIMS OF DOMINANCE IN THE HUGE STATE OF UTTAR PRADESH, MRS. GANDHI'S OWN. WHERE THINGS NOW STAND, AND WHERE THEY WILL EVENTUALLY END UP REMAIN HIGHLY UNCERTAIN.

8. IT IS DIFFICULT TO MAKE ANY GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE SIDED WITH ONE GROUP OR ANOTHER. BROAD IDEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATS FIGURE FORMIDALBY IN THE RHETORIC. THE REDDY GROUP SPEAKS OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY; WITH THE SPLIT IT HAS SHARPLY STEPPED UPKIFP ATTACK ON MRS. GANDHI'S ACTIONS DURING THE EMERGENCY AND HER "CULT OF PERSONALITY". THE FORMER PM HAS, AS IN 1969, REPRESENTED HERSELF AS THE GUARDIAN OF THE NEHRUVIAN PATH OF SOCIALISM, NON-ALIGNMENT, AND UPLIFT OF THE MINORITIES AND THE HARIJANS. SHE REMAINS UNREPENTANT ABOUT ABOUT THE EMERGENCY AND HER TIES WITH SANJAY, WHO CONTINUES TO BE PROMINENT IN HER RETINUE.
HER MESSAGE IS REPEATED DAILY IN THE

NATIONAL HERALD, WHICH HAS BEEN REVIVED AS HER ORGAN.

9. HOW IMPORTANT THESE CONSIDERATIONS ARE COMPARED TO OTHERS IS UNCLEAR IN A POLITICAL WORLD OF MIXED MOTIVES AND SHIFTING CALCULATIONS. THOSE WHO HAVE RALLIED TO MRS. GANDHI'S SUPPORT CANNOT EASILY BE CATEGORIZED. IMPORTANT AMONG THEM ARE THOSE WHO SEE IN HER A NATIONAL RALLYING POINT AGAINST THEIR LOCAL AND STATE FOES IN THE RIVAL CONGRESS FACT ON. FOR MANY OF THESE CONTRASSMEN, POLICY AND IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES ARE OF NO

IMPORTANCE. OTHERS HAVE GONE INTO MRS. GANDHI'S GROUP BECAUSE OF LONGSTANDING PERSONAL LOYALTY TO HER, OR THE LURE OF THE FUNDS THEY UNDERSTAND SHE HAS SQUIRRELED AWAY FROM THE CONFIDENTIAL

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1977 CAMPAIGN. SHE MAY ALSO BE SUCCEEDING IN REVIVING HER OLD APPEAL TO MUSLIMS AND HARIJANS, THOUGH EVIDENCE ON THIS SCORE IS NOT CONCLUSIVE. THE PRO-COMMUNIST GROUP WHICH BACKED HER IN THE 1969 SPLIT IS FAIRLY SOLIDLY AGAINST HER, HOWEVER. NOR HAS SHE RALLIED THE REFORM ST GROUP, ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN HER BATTLE AGAINST THE PARTY BARONS OF THAT TIME.

10. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY MANY WHO HAVE COME TO HER SIDE BECAUSE THEY SEE IN HER CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP THE ONLY HOPE OF A NATIONAL REVIVAL OF THE CONGRESS PARTY. IT IS TO THIS SENTIMENT THAT SHE APPEALS WHEN SHE CHARACTERIZES HER RIVALS AS WEAKLINGS AND JANATA COLLABORATIONISTS UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO TAKE THE HARD, AGITATIONAL LINE WHICH ALONG CAN SAVE THE PARTY. FOR A PARTY WHICH HAS SUFFERED THE UNEXPECTED TRAUMA OF THE 1977 ELECTION AND IS ONLY WITH DIFFICULTY ADJUSTING TO LOSS OF POWER, SUCH AN APPEAL IS PARTICULARLY TELLING. THOSE WHO RESPOND TO IT ARE NOT NECESSARILY ENDORSING AUTHORITARIANISM. THE CAPACITY FOR WISHFUL THINKING IN THEIR RANKS IS FORMIDABLE -- THE ARGUMENTS THAT M S. GANDHI HAS BEEN "CHASTENED" BY HER EXPERIENCE, THAT "OTHERS" WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR EMERGENCY EXCESSES, AND THAT SHE WILL IN FUTURE BE GUIDED BY BETTER ADVISORS ARE WELL-KNOWN HERE. SHOULD MRS. GANDHI RETURN TO POWER THOSE WHO BELIEVE THEM WILL BE DISILLUSIONED. BUT THE ODDS REMAIN HEAVILY AGAINST SUCH A DENOUEMENT TO HER PRESENT POLITICAL MANEUVERINGS.
GOHEEN

NOTE BY OC/T: SECTION 2 OF 3 NEW DELHI 1223 BEING SERVICED.
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